# The Inquirer

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# THE NO-GOD WORLD

## "OR ELSE!"

**By C. Bintcliffe**

WHEN I was a small boy I readily believed in God. Someone—I was told—must have made the universe, our world and everything in it. That was that, and no more questions were asked at the time.

Later, after the turbulence of adolescence, questions did arise, and in spite of the many sermons and addresses which I heard, the questions and doubts still persisted. The preachers' words on faith, forgiveness, a new life in God, neither stilled the questions, nor did they arouse a sharp, personal satisfying belief. It is true that the many words had some interest, but they were like the segments of a jigsaw which when put together made a picture of faith. But it was still a picture, a two-dimensional picture. I wanted a three-dimensional reality with perspectives.

In course of time I came to realise that some people had such a reality-belief. It probably came to them along different channels, for they expressed it differently, but it was recognisable, real and often transmittable. I began to discover also a line of thought which so far as one can see leads a long way to such a reality-belief, which the more one examines it the more disturbing and trouble it becomes. Although it is an enquiry needing some degree of consistent thought it is nowhere near so complicated as some reasonings against belief in God. Nor does it appear at first to have the emotional content of the familiar Evangelical appeal, but before one is through with it, it demands not only the mind's assent but the direction of one's life, will power and a moral choice. Finally it demands surrender—"or else . . . !

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It was this "— or else . . . ! which sharpened the issue, for the enquiry insisted on examining the consequences which follow a positive belief in God and the positive belief in No-God. It is an enquiry which once begun will not leave where we were. It compels the questioner to go forward. Not all enquiries, questions and answers are like that, but the really significant ones are. And our answer to the question of belief in God has its significance in that consequences affect us more deeply than do some other questions and answers. It is our subsequent involvement which registers the importance of a question. As an example of this we might visualise a husband-to-be asking dilly-dally questions about which suit he shall wear at his wedding. His questions may have some importance but it is nowhere near so important as his answer to the later question, "Will thou have this woman to be thy lawful wedded wife?"

It is this importance of "yes" and "no" to questions which rate their significance. To use a simile, they are like coins, they have a positive yes-side and an unspoken but equally important no-side.

We could for instance, ask a man, "Are you in the Armed Forces."? If he says "Yes" we know he is not a civilian. We could also ask a man, "Are you married"? and get the answer "Yes." But if we put the question, "Are you single"? and he answered "No" we should get the same truth about his status. One reply is one side of the coin, the other implies its opposite, but they are both there in the question.

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There is something of this in the question of believing in God. Just to say "Yes, I believe in him," or "I do not believe in him" is not complete. It's only half of our answer, for when we say "yes" to a really important question we are at the same time saying "no" to another question, just as the soldier in affirming his military status is indicating his civilian status.

When we say "Yes I believe in God," we are affirming our belief that God is the power with a mind who purposefully creates everything, including ourselves. Our "yes" is also a "no" to the opposite view, that all creation was and is a mindless, purposeless accident.

We have a yes-belief and a no-belief on the matter. And so has the man who says, "I do not believe in God." That statement is his no-belief. It is one side of the coin. With it, whether he realises it or not, is his yes-belief, that the creation of everything in this universe is a mindless accident. His views, which are simply a reversal of the believer's are just as plain. And here is the crux of the enquiry, either a creation by a purposeful intelligence or by a chancy mingling of elemental mindless energies. There are no other alternatives from which we can choose. It's one or the other, and no room for dilly-dally questions.

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"Well, what of it"? asks the man who is not very troubled about the question of belief. What difference does it make anyway? What difference does it make how the world was created?

On the face of it there may not appear to be much difference. We have to live in this world, we have to pay our way and bring our children up as well as we know how. We all have to face the risks of ill-health, poverty, grief, irrespective of how this world came into being. What does it matter if all creation is the result of a mindless cosmic accident?

After all, a chemist can mix two elements and produce a third unlike either of the elements. Might it not be that our universe and its worlds were created by some tremendous impact and radiation of cosmic energies, without any mind being present or having anything to do with it?

It sounds quite feasible. It sounds delightfully simple and complete, but don't let us forget that we humans are also a result of such a process. If we accept the view that all creation comes from non-personal, mindless origins we

can but include ourselves. It means that everything we are, our bodies, our minds, our feelings of despair and joy, our love of beauty, come from the same energy source as a mountain, a tree, our food and the horrible ginger tomcat next door.

Nor can we wriggle out of this conclusion by saying that the thinking-feeling part of us might have come from other sources. In a No-God creation there cannot be any other source. To suggest otherwise is to admit some kind of mental invasion into creation. And no really consistent believer in a mindless creation can admit that for it would at once hand his case over to the opposite view.

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Thus we come to the conclusion that our minds, our dispositions, our temperaments, our characters come from the same origins as our bodies and our physical shape, from origins over which we have no initial control for we are not directly responsible.

Look at it as we will. In the world of No-God the emotions of love and hate, sacrifice and betrayal have the same equality of being. There are no moral judgments apart from human nature for even these are but the products of a mind which is the product of a mindless energy. They have no greater value than their source.

The view that human nature is but the sport of the impersonal, inevitably drives to the conclusion that one emotion is no more valuable than another. It means that the murderous emotions of a Hitler are of no less worth or significance than the self-sacrifical life of a Albert Shweitzer. It means that Christ's self-emptying passion is worth no more than the treachery of Judas.

This is the dilemma of the No-God belief. There are no fundamental distinctions of human values. There are no real standards by which we can blame or praise the deeds of human beings, for all human nature and its behaviour springs from an impersonal energy which is devoid of moral values.

Here is the issue for Everyman. Belief in a mind which purposefully creates us, or belief in a mindless force which accidently creates men and women, their strivings, their loves, their heroisms, their laughter and joy which must inevitably fade into a meaningless nothingness.

It is from this meaningless horror, this alternative, this '—or else . . .' that I turn and cleave to the tremendous assertion that God *is*. That his Mind, Person and Power is throbbing through creation, that he is a Presence whom we can touch in our every search for truth, in every haunting glimpse of beauty, in every desperate struggle for human worth.

## A NEW MEMBER SPEAKS

**(The following is a shortened version of an address given in the Khasi-Jaintia Unitarian Church, Assam, by a Khasi, Bronwell Wallang. He is now Margaret Barr's assistant and dispenser. He was welcomed to membership of the church on the previous Sunday, May 10th.)**

LET me associate what I want to say to you with the address given last Sunday by our leader, Ekiman Singh, at the service at which he welcomed me to membership of the church. I agreed completely with what he said and want to remind you of it. He said that we make a mistake when we use the expression "change of religion" when somebody joins a church. We do not change our religion though we may change our creed. And in my case I did not even need to change my creed.

When I was a child my mother and father were Khasis, belonging to no church, but it was from them that I got the teaching that has been dominant in my life ever since. They taught me to worship and pray to the One great Creator and Sustainer in whom all Khasis believe. They did not practise sacrifices or sorcery, nor did they teach me to be afraid of demons. Above all they taught, and their lives showed that, for them, the heart of religion lay in love and sympathy for their fellow-men. Though poor, their home was always a refuge for the homeless and destitute, and as a little child I scarcely knew which of the big brothers around me were my own real brothers and which were the penniless orphans that my parents had taken under their wing. Worship of the One God, love and service for my fellowmen, to keep a smiling face through trouble and difficulty, and to trust to knowledge and science instead of sacrifice and sorcery to cure man's bodily ills—these are the rules of life and religion that I learnt from my Khasi parents. My father remained to the end of his life "just Khasi," and though crippled and paralysed for many years, his trust and good cheer and love for his fellows never flagged. My mother has joined the R.C. church of recent years, but I do not find that she has in any way changed her religion.

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As for me, till now I have remained outside all the churches, because they all seemed to require professions of faith in things that I did not understand and could not accept. But when at last I found a group which stressed everything in which my parents had taught me to believe and required nothing contrary to what my reason told me to be true, with joy I realised that that was the group for me to belong to, and I hope and believe that my membership of it will take me much further on the path of religion and the good life.

Some of you may perhaps have thought that my engagement to a member of this congregation had something to do with my joining. In a way it had, but not in the way that is generally supposed. Even if I had remained outside the church there would have been no obstacle to our union. When we got engaged she urged me to stand firm in my own religion and not accept for her sake things that would have no roots in me if undertaken for any ulterior motive. She never tried to persuade me to join and I greatly appreciated her attitude and her words. Nevertheless it seemed best to me that we should be at one in our religion and church as well as in everything else, not only for our own sakes but above all for the sake of the children we hope to have, so that there may be perfect harmony between us both in our home and in our church. So, as I had found nothing in her creed, her religion or her church that was contrary to my own, I decided, and with great joy, to offer myself for membership. Since when she too has revealed her great joy in finding that her husband is a man whose spiritual life is so much in harmony with her own, and whose first aim is to promote unity both in home and church.

In conclusion let me say that, though we are such a tiny group here at this service, I feel that, in standing before you, I am standing also in the presence of thousands of Unitarians all over the world, and that my membership of this little church links me with all those who are proud to bear the name Unitarian. May God help us all to be worthy bearers of that name.

## THE YOUTH SUPPLEMENT

### BY THE UNITARIAN YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEAGUE

#### Adult Leadership Needed

THE Unitarian Young Peoples' League—A stuffy name for a lively organization! Little wonder that it is generally known as the Y.P.L. We tend to forget the 'U' and what it stands for . . .

During the time that I have been a member of the U.Y.P.L. I have questioned many members about the meaning of the word "Unitarianism"—and very few of them knew the answer. Most were interested enough to want to know, and we had friendly arguments about it. "Don't believe in Christ" was the answer I get most frequently. Why don't they ask their minister? Some do, it is true; but on the whole, the minister seems too set apart from the young people to encourage their questions and problems.

But the young people who concern me, are those who don't want to know, aren't interested, and "couldn't care less". They are the drones in the U.Y.P.L. They belong

because the branch has the best table-tennis table in the district, or because there some "smashing" girls there. I have often wondered whether or not these people should be members of the U.Y.P.L.; but it is a difficult question, and I don't know the answer.

For those young people who are interested in Unitarianism, the minister should be ready to give a helping hand. Unfortunately not all of our ministers are interested in young people; it takes all sorts of ministers to make a religion. Some chapel committees, too, are very backward in their attitude towards the younger generation; they are only prepared to tolerate a U.Y.P.L. branch so long as no windows are broken, and nobody treads on the flower beds. I have been lucky in my experience of congregations; both of those that I know well give all the help they can to the U.Y.P.L. and invite the branch to appoint a representative as a voting member of the Chapel Committee. This provides an excellent opportunity for airing grievances on both sides.

But even with representation on committee, other problems remain. Not everyone who has a grumble is prepared to be open about it, and the real clue to the establishment of good relationship between youth and age, lies in the sphere of adult leadership. An adult in his thirties would be ideal.

With the help of an adult leader, the branch is more likely to take an active part in the church's Advance Campaign. The U.Y.P.L. can give almost unlimited help. It is always easier to attract people to a spotlessly clean church than to one with dust on its lamp-shades: and here, the U.Y.P.L. as a branch, or even as a region, is able to help, and to enjoy it. A branch which is active in this way is not only on better terms with the congregation, but is itself more worth-while.

Social service is a field of activity largely neglected in the U.Y.P.L., and again the branch would benefit much from ministerial and adult guidance. The branch, after all, is a church youth group, not just a social club; and it should be known in the district for the good it does, not for the row it makes on the way home on Sunday night. The Young Friends have fewer members than we, and live at a greater distance from their meeting place, but they are far more active in social service. There are areas in the industrial North where the Y.F. means much, but I know of only one town where the U.Y.P.L. has anything to its credit among the townspeople.

No branch enjoys playing all the time, but a creative effort all too often needs guidance, which our elders are just not prepared to give. The lively branch is that with a balanced programme; but balanced programmes do not grow on trees. They can be planned only by experience, and with the help of understanding adults.

The U.Y.P.L. itself has not always made the best possible effort in its programme planning, but this is chiefly for want of direction from above. Regional rallies can be useful and successful, but they too must be planned creatively and imaginatively. We have too often geared our programmes to cater for the lowest tastes; only a more serious approach to the problems of youth and religion will enable the U.Y.P.L. to find its feet, and really become the denominational youth organization—which it is at the moment only in name, and very rarely in deed.

KEITH M. NOBLE.

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### Exeter Assembly

The Exeter Assembly (founded 1655) met for their Annual Gathering at George's Meeting, Exeter. The Rev. J. W. Mace, of Cullompton, Moderator for 1958/59, conducted the Service. Mr. E. W. Joslin, the Hon. Treasurer, gave the financial report, was thanked for his efficient stewardship and re-elected. It was deeply regretted that the Rev. Ch. G. Towne, of Monmouthshire, became ill health, was unable to be present and had to resign from the office of Scribe which he had held for five years. The Rev. H. Whittaker, of Sidmouth, was elected as his successor, and the Rev. Dr. F. D. Meyer-Kluge, of Exeter, as Moderator for 1959/60.

## NEWS FROM THE NORTH

**From a Northern Correspondent**

### Such a busy week-end

AT last the doors of the new Wythenshawe Unitarian and Free Christian Church are open, and many it is who have already passed through those welcoming doors of freedom. Saturday, June 6th, saw 390 people crammed into the new church which is designed only to hold 250. The early arrivals who were making sure of a seat (for many had to stand throughout the service) were able to listen to the melodious tones of the Compton electronic organ for a full hour before the service began. At the pre-arranged time of 3 p.m. the service was begun—the singing could have equalled that of a Methodist rally and the happiness that of a child on Christmas morning. The Rev. A. W. Vallance opened the church officially and preached another of his inspiring addresses, this time on dual-purpose churches. Members of the City Council, including the Lord Mayor of Manchester, Members of Parliament, parsons, students and the U.Y.P.L. were all present.

During the singing of the last hymn the typical Manchester weather tested the waterproofing of the new building. It stood it!

On Sunday afternoon seventy-three children came along to Sunday school and the evening service was shared by eighty-two worshippers. The Rev. John Gill christened two little girls immediately after the Sunday school service.

### Our new ministers

With the close of the educational year in sight many University students will be entering the great world of industrial administration, medicine, or law after spending anything up to six or seven years in college or university. Many young men will be entering their first posts as ministers of religion—five of them from Unitarian College, Manchester. Mr. William McMillan, who has been six years in the College will be returning to his native Ireland in July to minister to two churches—Newry, and Warren Point. Mr. Lawrence Hallworth, who has been lay pastor at Padiham for about three years passes out as a fully qualified minister at the end of term and remains at Padiham. Mr. Derek Smith, who, like Mr. Hallworth, is to minister to the congregation which he has served as lay pastor. He remains at Mossley after four years part-time college training.

One other minister who qualifies at the end of the 1958-9 year has already been mentioned in this column in previous issues of *The Inquirer*, he is Mr. Donald Dunkley, who goes to Buxton.

To all these, our new ministers, we extend our heartiest congratulations and wish them every success in the carrying out of God's great work, to which they have resolved themselves.

### Revivalist ministers within our Movement

To revive a Young Peoples' League at a small country church is no mean task, yet Messrs. Webster, Skelton, and Smith (all students at U.C.M.) have done just that. At Mottram, Cheshire, a once-vigorous U.Y.P.L. dwindled away for the usual unknown reason that most chapels experience, and in a small Cheshire town where the Congregationalists and the Anglicans both have large and attractive youth clubs it is difficult to find the non-committed ones who are willing to be "guinea pig" members of a new, or at least re-instigated youth group. However, these things seem to iron themselves out eventually when there is enough eager enthusiasm to work with, and the three inspired students have found over a dozen regular Thursday attenders to the Y.P.L. over the past three months. Mottram is again a recognised branch of National U.Y.P.L. and owns a good record-player and amplifier which they are using for socials and parties, but the group does not exist for pleasure alone; the members have redecorated the school room which they attend on Sundays. Given time, perhaps Mottram will become the strongest branch of Y.P.L., who knows?

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**Norwich.**—The congregation of the Octagon Chapel, adopting the proposals contained in the booklet "Forward Together", has undertaken a Four-Year Effort, to terminate in 1962, the tercentenary year of Nonconformity, with the object of publicising its faith and strengthening the church through an increase in its membership.

As a first stage in this programme a series of five special services was held during April and May, on the theme "A Faith for the Modern Age". A special leaflet was drawn up and circulated widely in the

*Continued on next page*

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city, and other forms of advertising undertaken in preparation for the services. Ten strangers came to one or more of them, and of these, two have appeared again since, and two more newcomers have attended more than once after the campaign closed. In addition, two lapsed members of the congregation who came to the services continue to meet with us on Sunday mornings.

The next stage, now in preparation, is to be the holding of two week-night public meetings in a public hall in the city. The first of these, in November, will be addressed by the Rt. Hon. J. Chuter Ede.

## BROTHER JOHN

### A Tribute by Margaret Barr

FEW people have had so deep and pervasive an influence on my thinking and spiritual development as Will Hayes, who has been both guru and close friend to me for over thirty years. He had a genius for friendship, perhaps especially with women, and long years apart, during which little correspondence took place, never marred or changed in any way the quality of our fellowship on the rare occasions when we met. His voyage over the waters of life has been a far from tranquil one, but I have never known anyone with a deeper inward tranquillity or a greater power of tranquillizing others. It would be interesting to know (though in the nature of things a piece of information impossible to get) how many people there are all over the world, many who never met him, who feel, as I do, that something unique and precious has passed from life with his passing. His Church of the Great Companions, with its meeting-place at Chatham Unitarian Church and its spiritual dynamo at the little chapel at Meopham Green, has members all over the world, drawn in by his writings.

I will remember the awe with which I was seized on first entering his library and being introduced to that storehouse of scholarship and learning about the religions of the world, books for the most part far beyond all that I had read or could ever hope to read. He had no university degree but he was interested in the subject of his choice as few college graduates ever are in the subject which earns them their academic standing. Later, when the exigencies of poverty had reduced that library to the skeleton of its former self, it still contained many books that I had at best only dipped into. Yet in our talks (the talks which led to and followed the writing of The Great Unity) he could turn up at a moment's notice relevant passages in any of those books.

So many other things about him I should like to dwell on—his quiet sense of humour; his way of poking gentle fun at the follies of man; the staunch adherence to conviction that sent him cheerfully to gaol in the first World War, though he knew full well that if he submitted to medical inspection he would be rejected as unfit, but felt that such easy exemption would be a bad example to the young men of his study group; his very early grasp of the significance and greatness of Gandhi—all of these were of the essence of the man and his message. But above all he was the apostle of universalism, perhaps the greatest that our movement has produced, at any rate the one who has done more than any other to spread the message far beyond the confines of the Unitarian movement. We shall not let that message die, Brother John, nor shall we forget you.

## Correspondence

*Letters should be addressed to the Editor, "The Inquirer", 14 Gordon Square, London, W.C.1. They should not in general exceed three to four hundred words in length.*

*Letters are held over until next week*

### Change of Address

Dr. and Mrs. Flower, from Knoll Plot, Ringwood, to—17, Delph Road, Merley Wimborne, Dorset.

Mrs. Jessie Wilde, 14, Woodland Road, Manchester 19.

### Miscellaneous

Many Unitarians have been or are vegetarians. Information on this way of living, free from slaughter and its associations, gladly sent to others interested. Free literature on request from Secretary, London Vegetarian Society, 53 Marloes Road, Kensington, London, W.8.

### Holidays Abroad

Oberammergau Passion Play 1960. Unitarian Party (August 7th-20th) Tour Austrian Tyrol and sail down Rhine. Lone travellers and church groups especially welcome. Enquire immediately: Rev. Parkinson, 10a Westbourne Grove, Scarborough.

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